

Source for Quotation:

Ten focal points. Contributions to a brief and critical summary", Workshop on Sustainability Indicators and Criteria for Water Policy Formulation, *Contributions of the Participants. Medmenham, 26-27 June 1997*, edited by WRc on behalf of the Water 21 Team.

**WORKSHOP: SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS
AND CRITERIA FOR WATER POLICY FORMULATION**

Medmenham (London), 26-27 June 1997

WATER 21: PHASE III

Thursday 26 June

Session 2

Policy Integration and Subsidiarity

Introduction: Dipl.-Ing. R. Andreas Kraemer

Critique of Indicators: Dr. Peter Herbertson

Summary: Prof. Viriato Soromenho-Marques

Ten Focal Points

Contributions to a Brief and Critical Summary

The two papers from Andreas Kraemer, for the two working sessions of Thursday 26 June, and the address from Peter Herbertson, for Session 2, provide the background for my summary.

All the references can be found in the above mentioned papers written by Andreas Kraemer.

In my reflection, I decided to follow a structural approach ordered around ten focal points. These are formulated as assertions open to further discussion, followed by short remarks.

The emphasis of my discussion is on water policy formulation.

1. The Long Roots of an Ancient Genealogy

Commentary: I agree with the necessity of looking backward towards the origins of the concept of subsidiarity. Andreas Kraemer's attempt to extract some categorical content in Pius XI thoughts is rather interesting.

Nevertheless the most crucial feature of subsidiarity lies, in my opinion, in the fact that this concept is a kind of hidden metaphor for the current and uncomfortable European debate about federalism. A great deal of the polysemic and ambiguity associated with the term subsidiarity is rooted in this debate.

At present, many disapproving statements on federalism are being made in the European political arena. In spite of this, we should not forget, that both water policy and other areas of environmental policy are major drivers forcing the Member States of the European Union to address constitutional issues, the "covenant tasks". The partners in Europe must address the question of how to allocate and share power and responsibilities, a question which is at the heart of federalism.

2. Uncertainty about Time and Space Dimensions of Subsidiarity

Commentary: With the discussion of subsidiarity we are very far away from meeting the two following requirements:

∑ The definition of formal and rigorous indicators (both in time and spatial horizons).

On the one hand, we cannot tell what is the adequate time scale for decisions related to water policy formulation, especially concerning water resources.

On the other hand, using current available indicator methodology, we cannot draw accurate geographic boundaries of political units in line with the principles of subsidiarity within, for instance, a larger river basin area or greater importance.

∑ The design of models which are useful more generally and can be adapted for particular situations.

By their nature, indicators of subsidiarity are not pragmatic. So far, they are not developed to be suitable for judging individual cases.

3. The Sustainability-Subsidiarity Linkage: Values and Prejudices

Commentary: The relationship between sustainability and subsidiarity is embedded in a complex set of values, including the risk of twisted perceptions which collide with the task of rational analysis (see Euston & Gibson, 1985).

The only contra measure against the danger of prejudice is the self-discipline of critical thinking. One could be more precise: Local management, or water services for instance, has a tendency to overlook long-term impacts, in particular in times of financial stress. At the same time, normative approaches to achieving sustainable development tend to ignore the issue of (social and political) acceptability at the local level.

4. Sustainability Inside the Endless Debate about Modernity

Commentary: The association between sustainability and subsidiarity is profound and strong thanks to the long and endless controversy about modernity.

The two concepts reverberate the works of Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber, among many others. Concepts of community (Gemeinschaft), society (Gesellschaft) or rationalisation (Rationalisierung) resound amid the argument about the key issues of sustainability. In public policy, rationalisation has resulted in sectorisation, bureaucratisation and de-territorialisation. In the field of environment and resource policy, many now want to go back to 'territory' and 'community'.

As Andreas Kraemer showed in the beginning of his paper for Session 1 there is not a neutral standpoint on this debate (see O'Mahony and Skillington, 1996: 46).

5. Sustainability and Subsidiarity as Complementary Concepts in Conflict

Commentary: Sustainability and subsidiarity are complementary concepts, in particular if the emphasis is placed on the efficiency of policies and the 'right' level or territorial scope of decision-making and action needs to be found.

The search for sustainability indicators is raised amid the context of conflicting situations, where different levels of sustainability are jeopardised.

This means that the political process of decision-making in water policy is determined by a manifold and in some aspects contradictory multitude of interests, actors and particular goals. Therefore, it needs learning processes, and the forming of consensus which contributes to community building.

6. Subsidiarity: A principle for Greater Policy Integration to Promote Sustainability

Commentary: We should acknowledge the existence of a hierarchical, though dialectical and extremely dynamic relationship between one given pattern of sustainability and the correspondent set of subsidiarity requirements.

In the realm of water policy formulation we look at subsidiarity having in mind already the concept of sustainability. The latter is a superior and more integrated level of consideration, although the full range of its semantic possibilities are not fully explored most of the time. In effect, the concept of sustainability is the starting point for the search of the optimal application of the subsidiarity principle.

The main difference that separate me from Andreas Kraemer's reading of Eleanor Ostrom (1990) lies precisely in the fact that I understand that we always go from one understanding of sustainability to another, crossing the middle field of several subsidiarity levels, which are linked to our methodological tools.

To finish this topic: the subsidiarity levels and configurations help us to admit a certain kind of sustainability concept, but these levels do not give birth to the concept of sustainability itself, which is prior and has its original source both in rational thinking and in the less rational domain of political imagination.

7. Subsidiarity Indicators between Functional Limits and Territorial Boundaries

Commentary: The complexity of all the aspects involved should teach us, using the sharp expression of Pascal, to employ a little more of esprit de finesse, avoiding the perils of very broad conclusions without enough theoretical and empirical foundations.

Because of this I cannot agree with the utility of framing a principle that, in case of doubt or conflict, confers privilege in matters of power's allocation to the lower or more decentralised political structure (see Centre for Economic Policy Research, 1993: 7).

In order to avoid a kind of 'central war' between subsidiarity requirements and sustainability goals we should underline the idea that subsidiarity is - often in a very clear way - a matter of power sharing on specific items inside the same space dimension, rather than having full power to be used at a particular regional/local area.

Otherwise we should find a compromise very important acquisitions such as: a) the river basin management principle; b) the sensitivity of particular ecosystems, like estuarine areas.

This idea seems to be present also in what Peter Herbertson, is his address, called "levels of subsidiarity".

8. The Plural and Creative Role of Science in Framing Subsidiarity Indicators

Commentary: Subsidiarity indicators should give us a dynamic view of sustainability in its own making, in so far as it relates to several levels of administration, among different actors and interests, among several and virtually contradictory arrangements of values and insight.

Therefore the role of science (both natural and social sciences) and scientific bodies should be enhanced, not only in the monitoring tasks but also inside the reaching-of-consensus-political process.

If goals define partially and initially the type of indicators used, we should not forget that science can also influence the development of new indicators which will in turn shift, the definition of the goals.

9. Subsidiarity Indicators for Evaluating 'Capacity Building'

Commentary: When using indicators of subsidiarity for evaluating the success or otherwise of capacity building (in the sense of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992) several levels and various features need to be considered. Among those levels and features, the following should be highlighted:

- ∑ Local government institutions and competencies
- ∑ Civil society political values and practice
- ∑ Visibility of actors and interests
- ∑ Social learning skills (improvement of water literacy and awareness)
- ∑ Structure and flexibility of communication channels among different actors
- ∑ Methods and institutions for inside & outside conflict resolution

10. The Dual Nature of Subsidiarity Indicators

Commentary: Last but not least, it is crucial to emphasise that any set of subsidiarity indicators must be understood as part of a sustainable social and political process, or metaphorically speaking, as a star amid the framework of a wider constellation.

Therefore every set of subsidiarity indicators has a dual nature:

Σ descriptive and empirical

Σ prospective and normative.

In this large area of facts and values, of deeds and projections, of things-as-they-are and things-as-they should-be, there is ample room for civic and environmental ethics, awareness and education.

Viriato Soromenho-Marques